

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

How to Create a Perfect Job Endorsement

By Robert Mandelberg, CPRW

People generally have a difficult time tooting their own horns. Normally, modesty is a commendable trait; but on a job search it could be deadly. And that is where **letters of recommendation** can help. Why brag about how great you are when you can get someone else to do it for you? Letters of recommendation are basically testimonials from satisfied "customers." And they can be a lot more believable than resumes since they come from objective third parties.

Here are **4 surefire tips to creating powerful and convincing letters of recommendation**:

- **Who?** *Who will make the most impact?* Your immediate supervisor is generally the very best person to write a letter of recommendation. She has the most knowledge of your performance, abilities, and results. She can attest to how you have positively impacted the company. Many people assume that company owners and presidents are the best referrals. But unless you have direct interaction with these executives, they are usually too far removed from day-to-day operations to be aware of your talents or value.
- **When?** *When is the ideal time to have a recommendation letter prepared?* While you are still with the company. As soon as plans for your separation are discussed, immediately line up your references. This enables you to put the process in motion quickly and follow up to ensure it is completed. If you wait until after you leave the company, you may find it awkward to pick up the phone and ask the boss for a favor. And with you out of sight, this task may drag on for quite some time before it gets done.
- **What?** *What type of information should be included?* Instead of generalities, an effective testimonial cites specific achievements that clearly define the value an employee brought to the company. "*Bill Reynolds was a loyal, dedicated employee who could be counted on to give his all*" is nowhere near as powerful as "*Bill Reynolds spearheaded a division-wide project to upgrade our e-mail system, which reduced our outside consulting fees by 12%*." Do you see the difference? **Numbers, tangible results, and accomplishments** speak volumes about the worth of an employee.
- **How?** *How do I get my boss to write a powerful testimonial?* Do you think writing a testimonial for someone is an easy task? Is it something that your boss could crank out in fifteen minutes or so? Probably not. A good recommendation letter takes some planning and thought to be effective. In fact, it may take a few drafts to get it just right. Is writing your letter a task that your boss is going to relish? Not likely. She has that big meeting coming up, the month-end report is due, and now this blasted letter. *Will it ever end???*

Here is my suggestion: **Free your boss from this burden and write the letter yourself.** *Yes, you read that correctly!*

Do you feel a little uneasy about writing your own letter of recommendation? It's not as bad as it sounds. Once your supervisor agrees to write the letter, offer to prepare a draft that she could "tweak" and print on the company's letterhead. Your boss will be thankful that she doesn't have to labor over your testimonial and you can be sure that the letter has the ideal content and tone. As long as you are truthful, your draft should make it through practically unedited.

So make sure you are armed with a few well-written testimonials for your job search. It could very well be the extra "toot" your horn needs.

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